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The Owner Built Home - Chapter 9 Volume III - Form and Function - Do-It-Yourself Painting

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The Owner-Built Home — Chapter 9
Volume III — Form and Function
Do-It-Yourself Painting

By Ken Kern

If nothing else is learned from studying the series of chapters in this volume, it is hoped that the amateur home builder will at least be in position to ridicule the main slogan of the organized trades: "Relax—let an expert do it." We should not think of an expert builder as a special kind of man. We should rather think of every man as *a special kind of builder*, planning and working, perhaps with his wife, to meet the unique needs of the growing family. A certain romance surrounds the home building efforts of a congenial and loving husband-wife team.

It must be confessed that, from correspondence here, it appears that many amateur building attempts met with dismal failure; the owner-builder suffered a major disability owing to careless accident; or he was sidetracked by divorce arising from strained family relations; or he grew weary of well-doing, and relinquished his builder role to the ever-ready vulture-like subcontractor.

Such owner-builder experiences appear tragic to outsiders and humorous to those inside the building field. Yet *any* amateur building experience is the growing edge of the fundamental relationship among builder, tools, materials, and home that makes a man a man, *homo faber*. The successful amateur builders do not send woeful letters here; they build. Those of us who have had experience within the fold of the "expert" building industry realize that the only expertise offered is what stems from the grasping of as much monetary return as the traffic will bear. The commercial builder is not, of course, a bad man at heart; but, in addition to the profit motive, he is encumbered with tedious distractions and involvements: unfair competition, unions, estimates, insurance, loans, taxes, contracts, licenses, permits, office overhead, memberships, and dues. But these are only the surface requirements that have to be met before the contractor can start a project. The really vicious aspects of conventional building construction are far more subtle—especially as the building specialists themselves are seldom aware of the corruptions within their own field. This general observation can best be illustrated, perhaps, by a brief historical account of the painting art in reference to building.

Credit for being the first painter known to the West will have to be shared by Noah of Biblical fame and the Cro-Magnon Reindeer Man. After his well-known ark was completed, Noah "pitched it within and without." Pitch (asphaltum) is still used by varnish manufacturers to produce protective coatings. Pre-historic cave man, it seems, was more interested in the decorative aspects of paint. He mixed simple earth colors with animal fats and painted the walls of his cave-houses.

Decorative painting assumed an important role in the lives of Babylonian, Egyptian, Greek, and Roman ruling classes. White lead was extracted and used as early as 430 B.C. by the Romans. In medieval times the *people* used paint to decorate and protect the spokes of their carts and the handles of their various agricultural implements.

With the advent of the Renaissance came the guild organization of master, journeyman, and apprentice. The formation of the Old English "Payntour-Steynor" guild in the 13th century laid the groundwork for our equally hidebound unions and trade organizations. In the early history of painting guilds are items that might have come from a contemporary grievance committee:

In 1488 the Mayor was petitioned to halt the ingress of "foreyns" (outsiders) from working in the city limits, thereby taking work from members of the guild. . . . In 1502 the Companies of Painters and Stainers were united into one company. . . . In 1575 the Payntours-Steynors petitioned the Queen against Plasterers who were infringing on their painting work.

In 1581 the Payntours-Steynors received a new charter, seal, and license from Queen Elizabeth. This new ordinance required seven years' apprenticeship, except from the gentile class who were permitted to paint for their own private pleasure. No person was allowed to instruct another in the art, unless that person be an apprentice bound for seven years. All work had to be approved by the Masters and Wardens. Masters and Wardens had rights to enter any building for inspection and approval. They had the power to impose fines or destroy the work if it fell below standards. The oaths of all members required them to keep "the secrets of the mistery, and not reveal these same except to apprentices and report all evils to the Company."

In 1606 it was determined that the price for laying color or oil paint upon any flat surface must be sixteen pence per day. Later the cost was figured by the square yard of surface covered. The work day was stipulated to be from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. As the Company grew in size and political strength, it started labor exchanges for the employment of painters. These became meeting places and finally evolved into our current labor unions. Masters and Wardens founded The Institute of British Decorators which in this country is called the Painting and Decorating Contractors of America.

(to be continued)

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Arthur Harvey To Build Ad Section

Arthur Harvey, a homesteader and articulate decentralist, edits his *Greenleaf* at Raymond, N. H. He is active in other educational movements, and in addition has volunteered to manage the advertising for *Green Revolution*. He will give it thorough and business-like attention and we look forward to an increasing number of satisfied customers. Write and send ads and remittance to him.

Recently L. K. Lindenbauer, D.C., Wickenburg, Ariz., wrote regarding the ad we carried on a \$50 diploma in Naturopathy for \$10 from England, saying: "This is an insult to an honorable profession. It takes years to study Naturopathy and the books alone cost hundreds of dollars. No one could possibly obtain a license with such a diploma as you advertise."

Replies

To which Editor Loomis replied: "... The cost of an article does not always determine its value. For instance, both School of Living and the Hatch Loan-Library supply books to readers for postage—which is way under cost. . . . This advertiser said he would grant a diploma; he did not say he would guarantee a license. It seems to me one could claim fraud only if he did not supply the promised 46 lessons. A paper does have responsibility to carry ads from reputable persons, but the major responsibility, as in any purchase, is between the persons making the exchange."

Arthur Harvey also replied: "I think that most of the ads in *Green Revolution* have been fine, but Mildred Loomis has not had time to investigate and re-write ads as much as would have been desirable. In the case you object to, I would have checked before accepting it to see if something really useful is offered which might have been described better in different terms. I enclose our new ad policy which has strict standards, and when properly applied will avoid the problems you mention."

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